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ABSTRACT

In spite of the popular misconception of life in rural England as a rustic idyll, social and economic conditions there have created many issues which result in deprivation for rural youth. The major issues which affect employment, schooling, social, and domestic situations for rural youth are: (1) accessibility--lack of transportation; (2) centralisation of resources; (3) educational disadvantagement; (4) few job opportunities; (5) inner city policies; (6) poverty; and (7) lack of open space. A combination of these factors can lead to a way of life which limits personal development and improvement in life-style. Furthermore, the routine use of power by economically and socially dominant groups in local government expenditures has the effect that the already disadvantaged are further disadvantaged. However, opportunities do exist for the improvement of conditions for rural youth. Youth involvement in village and parish councils is needed, as well as active participation in the youth clubs which exist for them. Revisions are needed in the British Youth Service, so that the concern, vision, imagination, and thought that densely populated areas have received throughout the life of the youth service can be applied to youthwork in rural areas. (JD)

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

UNTIL THE FIRE AND THE ROSE ARE ONE

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1.1. Since its first emergence as a caring service, arising out of concern for urban slumdwellers in the latter half of last century, and through the various stages of its development and gradual acceptance since that time, the Youth Service has been very preoccupied with the problems of inner city areas and the way these affect young people. As proof of this statement one only has to read the range of documentation, reading between the lines of course, and this is quite clearly the case. Even when specific social concerns are examined - those which affect wider groups of young people - Homelessness, Racialism, Truancy, Delinquency and so on, invariably these are written from an urban point of view.

1.2. For those youth workers based in inner city areas, as I have been in the past, the recent snowballing concern for Rural Youth Work must seem to be of very small significance. Those involved with the problems of street life which results from inner city neglect, high density living, multi-racial tensions, and urban squalor, must be confused when they hear the vehemence with which an increasing number of youth workers have expressed their concern for young people growing up in the countryside, areas which are so often presented as the good life.

1.3. In this paper I will try to set out the reasons why I am concerned for rural young people and what it is that creates the particular conditions under which they grow up and develop. Much of it will talk about rural society generally rather than young people specifically, because I feel it is precisely our rural society and the way as a nation that we regard that society, that creates the environment determining rural young people's development and growth.

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"England's Green and Pleasant Land"

2.1. In the society of today, there exists a very prevalent form of folk-mythology. It exists in television commercials, and media soap operas, and can be traced back in time through children's fiction of this century, through Victorian parlour songs, through the court dances of Louis XVI, in eighteenth century classical music, through Grimms collections of folk tales and beyond. This is so much a part of our cultural thinking that this comes into the decision making directly affecting 20% of the population of Britain, and is used in the thinking behind the allocation of the Rate Support Grant. I am referring to the popular fantasy about rural life as being something to do with sunshine and streams, harvests and cider, flowers, wild life and endless freedom - the summer county image of the countryside.

2.2. In Britain one person has done most to affect and direct popular thinking about the countryside - and that is Enid Blyton. The majority of people think of the countryside as consisting of small, compact, caring communities, showing friendliness, loving awareness, concerned for each other, having an atmosphere something between a barn dance and a cricket match. Since the majority of people use the countryside for recreation, they assume that life there is just one long holiday.

2.3. If you were to ask me why this popular misconception exists - I suppose it's partly a kind of folklore, but also because of the urbanisation of our way of life. In Britain four of every five people live in towns with a population of over 10,000 people, and it is the thinking of townspeople which dominates the thinking of our particular society - dominating it sociologically, in terms of ethos, more and philosophy.

2.4. We live in a society which is becoming increasingly complex where policies are decided progressively further away from the people affected by them, which means that it is being gradually much harder for people to be involved in decision making, because they are less likely to know what is to be discussed. Also decision makers are increasingly having to rely less on accurate knowledge of situations, and more upon personal feelings or stereotypes.

"Man made the towns. God made the country"

3.1. In fact the shape of our countryside is man made and was largely created firstly between the Bronze age and the time of the Black Death as men cleared the land for Agriculture, and secondly during the Napoleonic Wars when Britain's trees were decimated to create the Navy which was so successful under Nelson. The pattern of villages developed in Medieval times with the interconnecting networks of communication and trade - villages separated by distances of about two to three miles, a reasonable walking distance, and Markets situated at a reasonable distance by donkey, horse and cart. Such towns as existed were in strategic locations for trade, commerce or defence, very small by today's standards, and housed an insignificant proportion of the population. Until about 1830 the majority of the population lived on, and scratched what living they could, from the land, but as the industrial revolution progressed more people were attracted from the land to work in the mills and factories, especially in the North, or to mine the coal which was to fire them. The opening of the canals and the later railways brought knowledge and awareness of the world outside the parochial barriers and also a dissatisfaction. Last century saw depopulation of the countryside, and a mass movement of people probably unprecedented since the Exodus.

3.2. The enclosures of late Medieval times provided the space for the sheep which brought the wealth to the Merchants who left their mark on pargetted Suffolk houses, and built magnificent churches from the Cotswolds to East Anglia, but this land was acquired by pushing out the peasants from village lands and common lands. This process accelerated again last century, most noticeably in Sunderland and Caithness with the Highland Clearings, so that in spite of vast increases of population there are parts of Scotland and Norfolk with less than half the population they had 150 years ago.

3.3. The next wave of depopulation took place in the 1920's and 1930's when in the recession which followed the first world war, government subsidies were removed, and farming crashed. Many small farmers were forced to sell out; many of the big estates were broken up into small units. Some County Councils

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developed a policy of buying up farms and installing the resident farmer as tenant, while in other places large tracts of land went untended for years. The late 30's and the necessity for a measure of wartime self-sufficiency led post-war governments to invest in Agriculture, in subsidies, in advice, in guaranteed markets. Grants of £10 an acre encouraged farmers to stretch the limits of their land, grubbing up footpaths and bridleways, pushing to the limits of their land. We had now entered a new era - the agro-industrial revolution - when the countryside has become a disciplined factory floor dedicated to food production. The biggest effect of this has been the change from a labour-intensive industry where a place could be found even for the inevitable village idiot to a highly mechanistic one. Within fifty years, the pace has accelerated so that what was a day's allocation for ploughing for one man can now be done in a little over 10 minutes by a tractor which doesn't even need the man.

3.4. In spite of being the predominant occupiers of space, in spite of being the largest single contributor to the Gross National Product, Agriculture is now very low in manpower. Only two out of every 100 rural workers actually works on the land, with only 3% more employed in the secondary industries which are dependant upon the land - canning; freezing; selling of seeds and supplies; vehicle and tractor maintenance.

3.5. Since the last war there has not been so much depopulation. In the South of England the position is reversed, with an invasion of the countryside by the "metropolitans in gum-boots", people seeking a life in the country using it for relaxation; by the "Armageddon Out" groups of seekers after self-sufficiency for whom the countryside personifies every-think which is ordered, natural and peaceful; and those with second homes wanting the advantages but not the obligations of rural life.

The Rural Ghetto

4.1. In spite of the popular rustic idyll, many issues exist which for rural young people are causing what can only be described as deprivation.

4.2. Accessibility - lack of transportation

Every year public transport is reduced, especially for rural areas. The petrol boom of the 1960's accelerated this process, but the recession in the late 1970's has caused many hardships. Private transport cost increases which formed part of this Government's monitarist policy hit hardest those dependant upon it, because there is no alternative. Such transport as does exist is usually geared to work patterns rather than leisure or domestic patterns, so often there is no evening transport, and little at weekends.

4.3. Centralisation of resources

In no other way is the urbanisation of our society more clearly demonstrated than in the centralisation of resources - a classic example of an urban solution being imposed as the answer to rural questions. In recent years schooling, leisure and domestic facilities are increasingly centralised at a distance from village dwellers.

4.4. A real hardship results when these two factors come together. A resource "centralised" to a place for which transport is not available, might as well be on the Moon.

4.5. Educational Disadvantagement

Research has shown that rural children do not do so well in examinations and fewer of them stay on at school. The system makes it difficult. There is the tiredness of travelling while some children from very isolated areas live away from home in hostels for the school week; the difficulties for rural teachers to undertake in-service training; the distances which make parent-to-school links difficult; and the lack of after-school activities when schools have to be run to bus timetables.

4.6. Few job opportunities

There have been tremendous changes in the pattern of agriculture since the war with the result that in our life-time farming has changed from being heavily labour-intensive employing a lot of people, to being highly mechanised. Job prospects have not kept pace with this, and it is now difficult for rural young people to get jobs.

4.7. A resulting social issue is the large numbers of young people leaving home in search of work. For example, workers with the young single homeless in London have to work with hundreds of young people from the Lowland areas of Scotland who have come south for work.

4.8. Inner City Policies

Governments in the last few years, especially the recent Socialist government, have been very concerned to build up inner city areas and avoid the excessive urban problems which have expressed themselves particularly in down-town New York and Chicago. Consequently millions of pounds have been poured into this, through bias in the national support of local government, through inner city industrial development, through an urban Aid Scheme and through Section 11. While not denying the need for this, I feel that the balance is entirely wrong. As a result rural areas, small towns and suburban areas have suffered from neglect.

4.9. Poverty

There is well documented evidence that this exists in pockets of the countryside, but there is also the other side of the coin, increased costs as a result of rural living, even for basic food. The price of milk can be as much as 30% more, as can bread. Meat and groceries are more expensive away from the towns and the rural shop or garage cannot afford to cut costs in order to attract more business.

4.10. Lack of open space

Young people find it very difficult to find areas for relaxation and sport when they are surrounded by the factory methods of modern farming. Hedges and fences have been pulled down, meadows ploughed up, streams put into piping, footpaths and tracks stretching back into history are lost for ever. The former meadow playgrounds now grow more "No trespassing" notices than wild flowers.

4.11. Each of the above factors can lead to a way of life which is boring, culturally uninteresting, and lacking those things which lead to character development and an extension of the personality. For many young people the one thing upon which they must depend for new ideas, for entertainment, for any kind of cultural growth, is the television. And yet the media also breeds dissatisfaction; since it raises people's expectations, so that they feel they are missing out on the exciting life in towns, and cannot find the sophisticated pastorale presented of country life.

4.12. In discussing the separate issues above I am not saying that there is no disadvantage with towns, nor do I seek to imply that any one of these taken alone is insuperable. It is the accumulation of factors which creates the deprivation. Let me just quote one passage from Roger Watkins of the now axed Centre for Educational Disadvantagement.
"The indicators suggest that, within the broad definition of rural areas, which encompass favoured commuter villages as well as subsistence level living, there are real pockets of social disadvantage which produce the same low levels of educational attainment in school as can be readily recognised in inner city areas. The disadvantaging family circumstances include, above all, low income and, associated with it, poor housing, social stress, and low educational aspirations. The additional rural hazard which compounds the problem is remoteness. This makes access to facilities that can compensate for educational deprivation difficult and it is an obstacle to the professional renewal of the teaching profession."

Can we afford the Countryside? Can we afford the City?

5.1. It probably does not need saying, but we have a Government that believes that very little should be paid for by the state, but if people want something then they must pay for it either as individuals or groups.

5.2. Against that background, it is clear that to bring resources to isolated rural areas can be very expensive because of the distances involved. It costs more to educate a young person. It costs more to bring in food and services, and so on. Because of this high economic cost, local government in some parts of Britain have had a policy of withdrawing services to certain isolated small villages. Roads are not repaired, water is cut off, Post Offices closed down, Social Services removed, electricity cut off.

5.3. Local Government decisions are realistically switching off the light for these villages - the "Category D" villages. Without getting too gloomy, some of these were decaying and would probably have died anyway, but what concerns me is that this thinking could spread to other areas where there are viable communities. I don't believe that all the economic arguments are completely honest. After all, admittedly urban areas support some of the cost for bringing services to isolated area, but everybody rural and urban pays for the costs of bringing motorways into London and the other cities, which runs to millions of pounds sterling for every mile. Is there not Knock for Knock?

The Voice in the Wilderness

6.1. Politically the countryside is a battlefield between a number of opposing factions, most of whom have their own campaigning lobbies publicising individual concerns and financial interests.

6.2. To the fore, is the National Farmers Union, politically very active, nationally recognised, with strong Parliamentary and E.E.C. links. Equally active, but with a low profile approach, is the County Landowners Association, concerned with the actual ownership of agricultural land. Government funds are put into the promotion of tourism which is a mixed blessing. The National Trust and Council for the Preservation of Rural England work to create a preserved but antiseptic countryside. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and other groups create wild life sanctuaries while a mirid of small groups look at the deeper issues of Conservation, often as a reaction

to crises as they occur offering protection to anything from the Vale of Belvoir to the Snakes Head Fritillery. While the Ramblers Association have done sterling work pioneering Long Distance Footpaths, and fighting encroachments onto footpaths and bridleways. Between all these organisations, support and protection is offered to farmers and landowners, hillsides and buildings, paths and coastlines, flora and fauna. But--- apart from one working party, The Campaign for Rural Youth, where are the pressure groups which protect the interests of rural people?
Where are the pressure groups protecting the interests of rural young people?

6.3. In our particular democracy concern for people is vested in the various organs of the local governments. The question of whether these represent the concerns of the mass of country dwellers is open for debate. If I take my own county of Suffolk which has been very carefully researched. Following on from the 1974 changes in local government elections all the following County Council posts were held by farmers or landowners:-

Chairman
Vice-Chairman
Leader of Council
Chairmen of all Key committees: Planning
Education
Social Services
Finance
Policy and Resources

6.4. The interest of somebody in power does not necessarily dictate the direction of their decisions, the majority of people enter the local government arena with the motive of altruism - but it can be an influence. A research team from University of East Anglia examining this issue concluded:-
"The fact is that politicians in Suffolk are obsessed with the maintenance of low rates. This is no new phenomenon to be laid at the door of the monetarist policies of the present (or any other) Government. Indeed it has a long history, as many councillors will agree. In 1975/76 only six counties levied a lower rate than Suffolk; while in the previous year only four counties spent less per capita on

education and social services, and none spent less on libraries. Only in two areas does Suffolk's expenditure rise above average spending for England and Wales - for the police and on roads.

"In the context of this discussion we would claim that such low levels of expenditure involve few costs for the already advantaged. For example, over half of all councillors for East Anglia attended private schools, and in many cases so do their children. Would they personally be hit by low levels of expenditure on education, or by cuts in the service? Similarly, the prosperous - many farmers, landowners, and the professional middle class - make little use of the social services. When, as happened in 1974/75, in Suffolk, domestic help for the elderly and nursery provision for the young are cut back, it is not they or their parents or children who would be likely to be affected. When the level of expenditure on temporary accommodation stands at a fraction of the average for all counties, it is not they, in their owner-occupied homes, who have to worry. On the contrary, the lower the rate the less they stand to lose.

"The argument advanced in the chapter is not that the power of economically and socially dominant groups such as the farmers in Suffolk is used by them in a cynical way to pursue their own interests. However, their intentions are neither here nor there. The fact remains that the effects of the routine use of power is such that <u>the already disadvantaged are further disadvantaged</u>." (our underlining)

6.5. In the light of these battles how are young people to participate and make their voice known? It is my firm belief that opportunities do exist, and that these are village level and parish council level. As a former Parish Council Chairman I would like to see young people involved at parish level, particularly as since the 1974 reorganisation, Parish Councils have increased powers for action and are increasingly sought after for advice. An active council which really represents and supports its constituency is a very viable force. As well as the Parish Council there are many village groups, some of which like Community Councils, Village Hall Committees or Playing Fields Committees, deliberately seek representatives

from across the range of organisations. I feel that young people should be in there, and it should be the members not the leader representing the youth club.

"For Goodness' Sake, save us from Planners"

7.1. From the community politics can we now turn our attention to Planners, a group with an almost impossible task. The job of a rural planner has been defined as working to strike the balance between five inter-related roles:-

1. the role of the countryside to produce food
2. the role of the countryside to act as a reservoir of land for urban development, and to provide resources for urban life, such as timber, minerals and water
3. the role of the countryside to provide a location for outdoor recreation
4. the role of the countryside to be a haven for wildlife and plants
5. the role of the countryside to be a place of peace and solitude to be like it was when one was young, or to be like it was when one first arrived

7.2. Under government instructions each County Council has in the last few years produced a County Structure Plan setting out the strategy for development in the next decade. If you can struggle through these you may well not find anything to argue with. However, as the practice develops from the theory there may well be problems for rural communities. Take the case of somewhere categorised as a "small village". Under this category no housing development is allowed which would extend the village boundary, only "infilling of the existing envelope" is allowed, which may mean no development at all. At the same time society is becoming more profligate of housing from greed and various other reasons. With the fall in the birthrate the average family will be getting smaller; there is an increase in one parent families; it is becoming more usual to find couples with no children at all; and at the same time people are living longer and the proportion of people who are retired is increasing. As a result of this, when there are only a fixed number of dwelling units, the number of children may fall. If this decrease falls below a

critical level, the local school is faced with staffing cut-backs or at worst closure. With the closure of the village school, the heart goes out of the village, families move away, and the houses are bought by the elderly, the holiday maker, or those who are rich enough to commute for all services - the "gentrification and gereatrification of the countryside" - a direct but unforeseen result of planning policy. Let me end with the words of the British Royal Town Planning Institute:-

"In our view the national purpose of the countryside should be:

(a) to conserve and prevent waste and pollution of our natural and environmental resources;

(b) to increase production of food, fuel and timber;

(c) to provide opportunities for the physical, intellectual and emotional enrichment of people.

Our essentially urban culture does not always leads to spontaneous action to achieve this purpose and hence some conscious planning and management of the countryside is necessary."

Life Chances for Rural Youth

8.1. We have come a long way round to arrive at this point, and I have talked at length about the distinctive social factors which impose themselves upon Rural Young People, and which create the social environment in which they live. Can we now turn to concentrate upon their leisure and specifically about the youth club provision which exists for them.

8.2. For many young people the full-time youth centre, or the school based youth wing is too far away for reasonable access and communication, so they are forced to fall back upon a youth club resulting from the village's voluntary resources. A very typical stereotype can be built up with most if not all the following in common.

1. Club uses premises which are not their own, but are multi - purpose, so they are competing with others for the premises which may mean that they don't get it every week.
2. The premises are under voluntary management.
3. Almost invariably there is no young person representative on the management committee.

Added to this is the lack of vision which comes partly from inadequate training, partly from the fact that people running the club find it difficult to spare much time to give to developing ideas because they are voluntary, and what I think of as the "if there's not a table-tennis table it isn't a youth club" syndrome. So often I have visited youth clubs in very small premises, only to find the one decent sized room filled with one enormous table-tennis table. Four people playing, or more often two, while the others are crushed against the wall just standing around. Whatever you see as the purpose of youth work---

---for keeping young people off the streets

---for the mental, physical, spiritual development of young people

---for social education

---for political education providing opportunities for young people's participation

whichever position you hold (and many people hold something between these) the picture above is depressing, by any standards, especially for members. There are of course similar clubs all over the place; but it is much more evident when young people do not have access to any other forms of interest, activity or self-expression.

8.3. If you look around the countryside there is very little experimentation going on to look at young people and rural problems. I have not been able to find more than a handful of examples, but here they are.

8.4. The only hall in one particular cluster of villages is part of a pub, which makes such a profit letting the premises for receptions and the like, that it is financially out of the reach of a small group of local youngsters. They met originally in somebody's garage, but bad weather and the need to protect the car in winter stopped that. With the help of

their vicar they have developed their own style of club. They persuaded a local community council to hire a minibus once a month which takes them into the nearest town to the sports centre where they hire the sports hall to use for whatever takes their fancy, football, volleyball, trampolining, handball, using the climbing wall and so on. Because they have chosen a Saturday night when there is no competition for the premises, and because they book a year in advance, they have negotiated the most advantageous rates. In the intervening weeks they have evenings of crafts or interests. Everybody in the area was canvassed to discover their interests, beekeeping, archeology, ornithology, walking, handwork of all kinds, asking if they would be willing to spend one or a few evenings in a row, at their own home, sharing their interest with a few young people. As a result the club has a programme for the whole year which once a week offers a choice of 2 or 3 activities, craft on a winter evening, a "physical" evening once a month, and then other outings during the summer.

8.5. One District of scouts have developed a cellular approach for cub groups in the rural areas of the county. The cubs in one village, who may be from one, two or three families, form a cell, who meet weekly at one house or in rotation, and do badgework with a parent as a small group. Additionally they belong to an area pack which meets monthly, and does the wide games, camps, drama sessions, or barbecues and the parts of the programme which require larger social gatherings.

8.6. Some counties have developed patterns giving their full-time staff a district responsibility, a system which can work very well, especially if they have a Youth and Community brief. Unfortunately too many of them are clubwork trained and are too paternalistic in the approach. We have a need to develop and train youth workers in the intricasies of community politics. It takes a particular sensitivity to find the midway between the worker of zeal who whips discussions on issues which may seem big to outsiders, but are not of concern to the people who live there, and the other who rushes around doing the jobs for everybody instead of helping them with their own concerns, helping the process of identification, articulation, development and possible solution.

8.7. One big area of experimentation results from the philosophy that if you can't get the people to the resources, then the resources must be taken to the people. This thinking behind mobile shops, post offices and libraries, has been extended to a variety of other road shows:- theatre groups such as 9:84 in Scotland, and Bath Arts Workshop; there is the "Reels on Wheels" project in Dorset which takes films round to villages, the "Take 5" group in Avon have a mobile circus to bring programme ideas. Lancashire County Council have a mobile youth club a 30ft juggernaut with a coffee bar and discussion area which is used to provide the initial impulse to set up village youth clubs, the community gradually being weaned away into becoming more self-reliant. I would like to see young people working in this way. Identifying what skills or interests they have which would be a contribution for other clubs or young people nearby, polishing up a programme and going out to help to create successful evenings in other people's clubs. If they were reasonably well organised they could attract grants for equipment or running expenses.

8.8. As I see it, the time has come for youthwork in rural areas to receive a similar injection of concern, vision, imagination and thought, that densely populated areas have received throughout the life of the youth service. The British Youth Service is among the most poorly resourced in Europe - our rural young people are amongst the most neglected in Britain. I feel that the time is now ripe that we should deal with this.

8.9. I want to end with the words of young people themselves. I started writing this after returning from a conference of about 45 young people from all over Europe. They concluded their discussions with this statement:-

> "Recognising that young people in Rural Society have <u>no power base</u> we believe that they need to develop an awareness of their own potential for power, through the use of their idealism and ability for critical analysis.
> ---We see the need for political education within the overall educational milieu (school clubs etc)
> ---We see the need for better and more radical organisation of rural young people, enabling them

to operate their own clubs and to harness their political strength.

---We see the need for a free flow of information from the grass roots up and from the political structure down.

---We demand better facilities for rural youth activities, the provision of transport; (school buses etc) and the encouragement of exchange programmes.

---We demand more professional help in the training and support of volunteer youth workers and the provision of full-time paid youth workers in areas of greater need.

---We demand discrimination in favour of rural youth, which will particularly enable them to achieve independence, employment, and the ability to use their own initiatives.

We believe these demands can be best achieved through the process of decentralisation in education, industry and services."

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